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Article 347: Special Provision Relating to Language Spoken by a Section of the Population

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Article 347: Special Provision Relating to Language Spoken by a Section of the Population

India has hundreds of languages. A State picks its own official language. But what if a large group in that State speaks another language, and wants it recognised? Article 347 gives the President a way to step in. Yet the way most States have solved this problem is a different one. Which route is used, and why?

> **Article 347** President may direct recognition
> **Part XVII** Articles 343 to 351
> **Demand + satisfaction** Both are required
> **2014** Urdu ruling of the Supreme Court

1 What Does Article 347 Say?

- It applies when a substantial proportion of a State's people speak a language and want it recognised.
- First, a demand must be made.
- Then the President must be satisfied that the demand is real.
- The President may then direct that the language be officially recognised in that State.
- The direction can cover the whole State or only a part of it.
- The President decides the purposes for which the language is recognised.
- It is a protection for linguistic minorities inside a State.

Remember: Article 347 = demand + the President's satisfaction. Then the President may direct official recognition.

> **Quick check 1.** The President can act under Article 347 on his own, whenever he likes. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

> **Quick check 2.** Only the President can give a language official status in a State. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 How Is Article 347 Different from Article 345?

- **Article 345:** the State Legislature may adopt Hindi or any language in use in the State as its official language.
- This is the normal route. The State acts by its own law.
- **Article 347:** the President may direct recognition when a large group asks for it.
- This is the fallback route. The Union steps in on a demand.
- Memory aid: 345 = the State acts. 347 = the President directs.
- The two do not cancel each other. A State can recognise a second language without waiting for any presidential order.

3 What Happened in the Uttar Pradesh Urdu Case?

- The story starts with a State law. The **Uttar Pradesh Official Language Act, 1951** made Hindi the State's official language.
- Many people in the State spoke Urdu. They wanted it recognised too.
- In **1989**, the State amended its law. The change made Urdu a second official language for specified purposes.
- The State did this by its own law. There was no order from the President.
- The U.P. Hindi Sahitya Sammelan challenged the law in court. It argued that only Article 347 could be used for such recognition.
- The Allahabad High Court upheld the law. The matter then went to the Supreme Court.
- On 4 September 2014, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court gave its verdict.
- It held that the 1989 law was valid. Urdu could be the second official language for seven specified purposes.
- So a State does not need a presidential order under Article 347 to recognise another language.

Remember: 1989: UP law on Urdu, under Article 345. 4 September 2014: Supreme Court upholds it.

4 Why Is the Presidential Route Rarely Used?

- Most States simply pass their own law under **Article 345**.
- That is faster and needs no demand to the Union.
- So Article 347 works as a safety net. It is used rarely, if ever.
- It would matter only if a State refused to act on a real demand.
- Exams test this reason. An option that says Article 347 is often used is likely wrong.

5 What Else Is in the Language Part of the Constitution?

- Part XVII covers **Articles 343 to 351**.
- **Article 343:** Hindi in the Devanagari script is the official language of the Union.
- Article 346: the language for communication between States, and between a State and the Union.
- Article 348: the language of the Supreme Court and the High Courts.
- Article 350B: a Special Officer for linguistic minorities.
- The Eighth Schedule lists 22 languages. It began with 14.
- Do not mix up the two lists. A language in the Eighth Schedule is not automatically a State's official language.

6 What Should You Remember for Exams?

Must Know

- Article 347 lets the President direct official recognition of a language.
- It needs a demand and the President's satisfaction.

Good to Know

- States use Article 345 for their own languages.
- UP made Urdu a second official language in 1989.
- The Supreme Court upheld it on 4 September 2014.

Great to Know

- The President cannot act on his own **(Trap)**.
- States are not powerless **(Trap)**.
- Article 348, not 347, deals with court languages **(Trap)**.

Practice MCQs

1. What does Article 347 let the President do?

A. Direct that a language spoken by a substantial section of a State's population also be officially recognised

B. Ban the use of any language in government offices

C. Personally select every state's official language

D. Dissolve a State Legislature over a language dispute

See answer ↓

2. What must happen before the President can act under Article 347?

A. A demand must be made by the population wanting the language recognised, and the President must be satisfied it's genuine

B. Parliament must pass a special law

C. The Prime Minister must personally request it

D. The Supreme Court must first issue an order

See answer ↓

3. How did Uttar Pradesh recognise Urdu as its second official language, in 1989?

A. Through a Presidential order under Article 347

B. Through its own state law, using its legislative power under Article 345, not a Presidential order

C. Through a Supreme Court directive

D. Through a constitutional amendment

See answer ↓

4. What did the Supreme Court hold in U.P. Hindi Sahitya Sammelan v. State of Uttar Pradesh (4 September 2014)?

A. That Urdu's recognition as UP's second official language was unconstitutional

B. That only Article 347 could validly recognise Urdu in UP

C. That UP's own 1989 law recognising Urdu as its second official language, for specified purposes, was constitutionally valid

D. That Hindi could no longer be UP's official language

See answer ↓

5. Why has Article 347's Presidential-order route been used rarely, if ever, since Independence?

A. Because states more commonly recognise additional languages on their own, under their own legislative power in Article 345

B. Because Article 347 was repealed in 1989

C. Because the Eighth Schedule replaced Article 347 entirely

D. Because only Union Territories can invoke Article 347

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **A.** Article 347 lets the President direct that a language spoken by a substantial section of a State's population also be officially recognised, throughout the state or in part of it. ↑ Q1
2. **A.** The President can only act under Article 347 on a demand made by the population concerned, and must be satisfied that demand reflects a substantial proportion of the population. ↑ Q2
3. **B.** Uttar Pradesh recognised Urdu through its own state law under Article 345, not through a Presidential order under Article 347. ↑ Q3
4. **C.** The Supreme Court upheld UP's 1989 law recognising Urdu as its second official language for seven specified purposes, confirming a state doesn't need a Presidential order under Article 347 to act on its own. ↑ Q4
5. **A.** States typically recognise additional languages through their own legislative power under Article 345, as Uttar Pradesh did for Urdu, making Article 347's Presidential route rarely necessary. ↑ Q5

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **False.** ↑ 2

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